A Nordic approach to the ECE system

– can it make a difference in order to narrow the gap between socially at-risk children and more privileged children?

_Education of the youngest: A blessing or a Curse?_
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Themes

Who are the socially endangered children?
What do they need?
What can society do to combat the children’s social problems?
The Nordic model in policy, practice and research
A Danish trial – aimed at social innovation, a new way forward?
Theoretical and empirical background

Bernstein’s theories of the symbolics of codes
Bourdieu’s theory of social inequality
Theories of new possibilities in a post-modern society?
- or new risks?
Positive effects of ECE programmes starting in early childhood
Asking: What can society do to combat the children’s social problems?

We still know too little of effects of the early interventions viewed in a sociological perspective.

Furthermore, we know too little about what types of interventions are most effective (best practice) and factors promote and restrict educational intervention, respectively.
The Nordic model

Sweden’s curriculum
- responsibility and social readiness
- children’s sympathy and empathy
- no child be exposed to discrimination

Norway’s curriculum
- care, play and learning
- social interaction, language and communication skills
- an inclusive environment

Finland’s curriculum
- care, education and teaching -a whole
- treating children as equal individuals
- development and learning in formal and informal ways

The Danish curriculum
- experiences, play and education
- children’s concentration, exploration and experience
- prevent negative social heritage and exclusion

- Child-oriented, holistic learning perspective
- No learning standards, assessments
- Development in a broad sense
- Democracy in practice
- Social pedagogical tradition (holistic)
### Differences between the Nordic and the Anglo-Saxon models for ECE

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ECE approaches

Both approaches assume that a society can contribute to reducing social inequality by education children

- By supporting children’s development in a broad sense (Nordic model)

- By strengthening school-related achievements in a more narrow sense (Anglo-Saxon model)

“Successful programmes do not categorise young children as having developmental or language needs, but believe that young children will learn and develop quickly if given a supportive pedagogical environment” (Bennett, 2006, p. 150)
An analysis of the situation in practice and research in the Nordic countries – what challenges arise?

“Can day-care centres make a difference?”

“The kindergarten makes a difference”

“Day-care in private homes and socially endangered children”

“Research mapping and research appraisal of Scandinavian research in preschool education in 2006”
“Can day-care centres make a difference?”

Two paradigms: 1) a compensation strategy - and 2) an innovation strategy identified.

Teachers require 1) more time, 2) knowledge and 3) political improvement in order to change their current intervention – i.e. to move away from the compensation strategy.

Resources, organisation and qualifications of the teachers.

Ref: Jensen, B. (2005)
“The kindergarten makes a difference”

Implicit exclusion mechanisms operating in the day-to-day pedagogy

Some children often learn the same cultural codes at home as the ones that are expressed in the institutions. Others, risk moving on in their lives with subjective experiences or expectations that they are not competent or good enough

Institutions’ cultural codes and invisible power games are potential crucial points – as focus in the future development of ECE systems

“Day-care in private homes and socially endangered children”

The closeness between adult and child, better time and resources available to make the intervention more goal-oriented when there are only 3-5 children present

Staff often uneducated

For the present they are not ready to comply with e.g. the national curriculum and the professional basis for initiating theoretically adequate ECE-intervention

Jensen, B. et al. (2008, in press)
“Research mapping and research appraisal of Scandinavian research in preschool education in 2006”

Three categories 1) a sociological perspective, 2) an individualised psychological perspective and 3) on in- and exclusion mechanism in preschool

Further evidence that subtle marginalisation processes take place in daycare centres working against the aim of working for equity

Support other studies showing that working professionally with at-risk children requires certain professional qualifications

Ref: Kampmann, J. et al. (2008)
Conclusion:
The paradoxes of the Nordic model

One the hand the Nordic model provides unique opportunities for supporting all children through learning activities from a socio-pedagogical approach.

On the other hand, the Nordic model may produce, as shown in research and practice, risks of maintaining or even strengthening the reproduction of socio-cultural differences.
A Danish Trial
Action Competencies in Social Pedagogical Work with Socially Endangered Children (The ASP-project) - aimed at innovation

Value basis is the Nordic model

Focus of the intervention is to work pedagogically with exclusion/inclusion as a part of the learning processes

Jensen et al. (2006-2009)
The purpose of the ASP- intervention-and effect project

On the one hand it aims at developing an intervention strategy (the ASP-programme) which originates in the innovation paradigm - on the other hand it aims at testing the effects

Development of the intervention strategy inspired by research into implementation of evidence based knowledge and has been translated into the ASP vision of making ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ perspectives come together
The ASP-project - an overview of design

Methods
The study of 2700 3-6 year-old children in 60 day care centres is based on an RCT-design

The ASP-intervention programme
A qualification ‘package’:
- qualification folder, material build on evidence-based knowledge
- competence development process
- implementation strategies and processes

Combination of controlled and uncontrolled aspects of trials, way?

Outcomes
Children’s learning and competence development (individual level) (Questionnaires, baseline, midway, finals status)
the innovative culture development (institutional level) (Interview, self-descriptions, observations, casestudies)

Results
Baseline of assessing children’s competencies – to be published (2008)
Institutional differences – to be published as casestudies (2009)
The effect results – to be published 2009
The ASP explore five questions

The effects of the ASP intervention – i.e. the impact on children’s social and learning competences and does the gap narrow?

Are some institutions more effective than others (“Best practice”)?

What characterises “Best practice”?

Which factors are significant in terms of effect/the absence of effects?

Development continue after the ASP intervention has ended?
Some preliminary findings, march 2008

The more socially endangered the lower score on both learning and socio-emotional competence.

Huge differences in terms of the pedagogical work and basis for developing ‘best practice’

Teachers’ professional skills and qualifications concerning new challenges. It’s demanding for teacher working with the entire ECE/ASP-implementation process by having to reflect upon one’s own practice and role in relation to new knowledge of socially endangered children
Discussion

Children seen as agents in their own learning processes

The teachers are met with very demanding requirements

Huge differences between the quality and the implementation in the various institutions

Planned structured programmes and learning standards

Pedagogical theory and practice behind the concrete intervention
Conclusion: ECE systems – new challenges and perspectives in a time of globalisation

The Nordic model different from the structured programmes identified in international ECE programmes. No study provides sufficient evidence that the Nordic model is more (or less) efficient than the international efficient model programmes.

The sociological perspective, which together with a learning perspective constitute an alternative setting for working with ECE may offer new reflection and action possibilities in the pedagogical practice (ASP-programme).

A future perspective aims at investing in comparative studies on specifying factors that can explain effects of intervention, which can correspond to a new learning-oriented and global approach to ECE systems.
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